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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001667

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P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MCAP](#) [MOPS](#) [IR](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: HARIRI EXPLAINS HIS CONTINUING HIZBALLAH  
CONTACT

REF: A. BEIRUT 1658  
[B](#). BEIRUT 1541

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4  
(b) and (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador and NEA/ELA Office Director Nicole Champagne on November 20, parliamentary majority leader Saad Hariri said that he had spoken with Hizballah officials following his October 26 meeting with SYG Hassan Nasrallah (reftels) on a variety of topics. Hariri said the discussions had not focused on security issues, but rather "just keeping in touch" on policy matters such as the proposed expansion of the National Dialogue table, removal of Hizballah propaganda from the Beirut airport road, and a proposed reconstruction project similar to Solidere for the southern and eastern suburbs of Beirut. Hariri also said that recent opposition statements about possible delay of the upcoming parliamentary elections "are a sign of insecurity and an attempt to stir up trouble."

[1](#)2. (C) With regard to preparations for the parliamentary election, Hariri said, "we will win this round." He also said he would be sensitive to the political concerns of independent candidates who may be willing to join March 14 electoral lists. However, in this pre-election period, Hariri said it would be very important for the U.S. and other Western countries to deliver "very clear messages of support for Lebanon's independence and sovereignty" when engaging with Syrian officials. End Summary.

"Keeping in Touch" with Hizballah

[1](#)3. (C) Hariri told us that he had recently met with representatives of Hizballah, including Hussein Khalil, Nasrallah's Political Advisor. He stated that the recent talks had focused on policy issues, in contrast with his October 26 meeting with Nasrallah, which he had told us earlier had focused on security topics. "The Future Party will not be forming any 'security committees' like the other parties are doing. This brings back too many memories of the

civil war. It is the job of the nation's army, not individual political parties, to maintain national security," Hariri stated. (Note: The party of Saad's ally, Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, has been engaged in a security dialogue with Hizballah and opposition Druze leader Talal Arslan since the May 2008 violent clashes in Druze areas. End Note.)

¶4. (C) Khalil had come to ask for expanded participation in the National Dialogue, but Hariri said, but "he did not convince me. Participation was decided upon in Doha and any changes to the structure should wait until after the parliamentary elections." In an aside, Hariri also told us that the national dialogue is "going nowhere. People are happy for now that the meetings are taking place, but pretty soon they will realize that there are no actual results." Hariri believes that Hizballah is waiting for March 14 to concede on the National Defense strategy. "Not going to happen," e said. "We have a strong case that a sound national defense strategy not only impacts Lebanon, but the entire region." He labeled the security proposal presented by Michel Aoun at the November 5 National Dialogue session as "stupid." Hariri said March 14 would not bother with a counter-proposal, but would focus instead on the importance of strengthening national institutions such as the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the Internal Security Forces (ISF).

¶5. (C) Khalil also discussed Hizballah's willingness to remove propaganda from the Beirut airport access road, in accordance with the Doha agreement. We were surprised to learn from Hariri that PM Siniora had asked Hariri to raise the possibility of Hizballah providing support for

BEIRUT 00001667 002 OF 003

reconstruction projects similar to the Hariri-owned Solidere company, which revitalized Beirut's downtown area. Hariri mentioned Elissar (the proposed program for the southern suburbs of Beirut) and Linord (the proposed program for east Beirut) but he said cooperation was unlikely. ("Hizballah will not go for such initiatives, since these were not their ideas in the first place.")

"We Will Win the Election"

¶6. (C) Hariri said that he was confident that March 14 would win a majority in the upcoming parliamentary elections. He is also confident that independent candidates would move closer to March 14 than March 8. "Most are former Aounists, they oppose Hizballah, and they support a free and independent Lebanon." He said that there would be some room on the March 14 electoral lists for independents and he said that he would be sensitive to their public relations concerns. "If they join our list, we will rename it as a 'coalition' list so that it is not solely identified with March 14." Mentioning Zahle in particular, Hariri said there would definitely be an independent candidate on the March 14 list. When asked who, Hariri smiled and said, "We're going to surprise you."

¶7. (C) Hariri said March 14 must now try to anticipate counterattacks from the opposition. "They are capable of doing anything and everything because they need this continued internal strife to justify their own existence. Hariri believes that recent public statements by the opposition are signs of insecurity and "groundwork for a counterattack." (Note: On November 11, Nasrallah stated, "Not holding elections or postponing them would be very dangerous." On November 20, pro-opposition politician and former Deputy Speaker Elie Ferzli publicly warned March 14 against delaying the elections. "If March 14 tried to create a climate for delaying the elections, there will be no extension of the current parliament." End Note.)

¶8. (C) Hariri said, "There is concern being raised about a postponement of the election, but it is the opposition that is fanning public fears -- they are the ones who keep talking

about it. The Prime Minister had to state publicly today that elections are due to be held on time." When asked how the opposition could plan to delay the elections, Hariri paused, looked at the portrait of his late father and replied, "By killing someone."

#### "Our Soldiers Need Modern Equipment"

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¶9. (C) Hariri discussed, at length, the need for LAF and ISF officers to have adequate equipment, saying it was demoralizing for them to have to face Hizballah when severely under-equipped. He was pleased to learn from Ambassador that trilateral negotiations in Jordan on M60 tanks had produced positive results, but he continued to push for the acquisition of attack helicopters. Hariri then raised President Sleiman's upcoming visit to Iran. "They will offer him security assistance and I wouldn't be surprised if he accepted. After all, he wants to get the best equipment possible for our troops."

¶10. (C) Hariri also commented that the security situation in the north had improved and that some important arrests had been made recently. He bristled when asked about recent Syrian allegations that the Future Party had funded Fatah al Islam. "Everyone knows Syria's involvement with that organization."

#### Looking Forward

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¶11. (C) Hariri told us that the recent U.S. elections had improved America's image in the Middle East. "Most

BEIRUT 00001667 003 OF 003

importantly, we saw how formerly limiting barriers could be obliterated by the will of the people." He said that he hoped the new administration would be "aggressive" about solving the region's problems -- from Ghajar and Sheba'a Farms to the larger Middle East Peace Process.

¶12. (C) He also commented on recent international engagement with Syria. "You must all be clear in your statements during our pre-election season. Lebanon's sovereignty and independence must be respected and this is non-negotiable." Ambassador reassured him that U.S. officials were using this language on Lebanese sovereignty frequently and firmly by both Beirut and Washington. Hariri said that the Syrian and Iranians are trying to link all of the region's problems together in order to give themselves more leverage in negotiations with the U.S. Finally, Hariri dismissed the role the Egyptians were attempting to play in negotiations with Hamas. "People want the new American president to come in and solve the regions' problems. This role will not be given to Egypt."

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